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DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. 1. April 5, 1935—Nisan 2, 5695 No. 7

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EDITORIALS

Maimonides

THE celebration of Maimonides' eight-hundredth anniversary comes as a welcome relief from the usual round of Jewish activities, which is confined to fighting anti-Semitism and raising funds. For once, the Jews are occupied with a matter of inherent cultural interest; and for these days, when Jews should be wrestling with the problem of self-adjustment, there could be no more significant focus of attention than the personality and influence of Maimonides.

For the background of Maimonides' life was strikingly similar to our own: the end of an era of peace and tranquility in which Jews had flourished, spiritually and materially. The Jewry of Spain had enjoyed centuries of security and intellectual growth. Then the Mohammedan world was swept by fanaticism, like the Nazi fanaticism that we know. Jews were forced out; they sought refuge in other lands. Maimonides and his family fled to Egypt. Then as now, there were precious few havens. Then as now, the fact that high cultural levels had been attained did not impede the vicious outbreak of intolerant forces.

Then as now, Jewry found themselves in the depths of despair. They began to believe that God had really rejected them. Their career as a people was at an end. The panic that seized them was intensified by the disintegration of their cultural life. In their wanderings, their books were lost and torn. Other copies were inaccessible. Ignorance grew apace; while at the other end of the intellectual scale, the scholars and philosophers faced the ideological challenge of Greek thought. Today that same widespread ignorance prevails, and equivalent intellectual problems await solution.

Apparently untroubled by the enforced migrations, or by the multitude of his duties when finally he settled in Cairo, Maimonides plunged into the battle on all fronts. In the *Mishneh Torah* he brought order out of the intricate welter of Jewish traditions and practices, and made available for the plain Jew a knowledge of what was expected of him. Here was a steadying influence, an unchanging regimen in a changing world, spiritual anchorage in an angry sea. In the "Guide to the Perplexed", Maimonides sank the foundations of Jewish religion deep into the bedrock of reason. He wrought a structure of Judaism that was as firm, as beautiful in form and meaning as the finest Greek edifice of philosophy. In his letters, his responsa, his personal contacts, he gave confidence, hope, the assurance of a future to his people.

There are undoubtedly other personalities in the history of our people whose lives and activities might serve Jewry today as a source of inspiration. What makes Maimonides unique, however, is the fact that, in a world so much like our own, ridden with intolerance, confusion and upheaval, he resolved conflicts, and recreated the life of the Jewish people. The celebration of his birth, therefore, should remind us that there is resilience and vigor in our people and in its cultural heritage; that there is no need to surrender to the sense of hopelessness. We need today exactly what Maimonides provided for his day: to reconstruct our ideology, and to lift the heavy fog of our mass ignorance.

This is the task to which all who feign to honor the name of Maimonides must hereafter dedicate themselves.

The Pulpit and Social Issues

THE recent arrest of John Strachey and the fact that that arrest took place in a synagogue in which Mr. Strachey had just delivered a lecture have given occasion to a number of Jewish wiseacres to say "I told you so." Columnists like B. Smolar in the *Jewish Daily Bulletin* and conservative laymen generally point to this incident as a proof of the fact that politics has no place in the synagogue. With that conclusion we disagree.

Shall the rabbi stay out of social issues? It should be remembered that the religious teacher has a function aside from the conveyance of a creed and of an individual morality, that he is also a teacher of social ideals. Those who protest against pulpit discussion of economic problems seem to forget that Judaism teaches the divinity of man, his right to the fullness of life, and to protection against oppression; that it has always insisted upon the social use of wealth and upon human cooperation as the ideal principle for the ordering of society. They seem to forget that Moses legislated against exploitation, that Amos, Isaiah and the Rabbis of the Talmudic age were intensely concerned about the social problems of their day.

What would these critics have the rabbis do? Would they have them betray the doctrines of the masters of Jewish tradition? Would they have them talk theology and ethics in vague generalities without applying them to specific situations and thus make religion a social fatuity? Would they have the modern teacher of religion render religion impotent as a force in society? Rabbis who take their duties seriously are not quite ready to turn their backs on one of the major emphases of Judaism; nor are they quite prepared to hold ideals without attempting to make them effective.

As proof, let us quote the Pronouncement on Social Justice adopted by the Rabbinical Assembly of America in its last convention at Tannersville, New York: "We maintain it to be a function of religion not merely to give solace to the individual in a world of travail and sorrow but also and primarily, 'to order the world after the Kingdom of the Almighty,' to embody, that is to say, in human society, those ethical ideals and spiritual values which are to us the evidence of God's sovereignty. In the light of the very nature of religion, we affirm that the discussion of problems of social and economic justice and the evaluation of movements to abolish exploitation, poverty, war and other social evils are not only legitimate but even necessary subject matters for treatment from the pulpit by ministers of religion. Without claiming for rabbinical utterances on social problems any authority other than inheres in whatever truth they may convey, we insist that no arbitrary limit be placed on the freedom of speech of rabbis on those themes either in their individual or collective utterances."

The fact of the matter remains that the most glorious pages in the history of religion are those in which teachers of religion have taught for the application of their ideals in society. Even the reactionaries of our day, who would have rabbis adopt a "hush" policy, honor the names of Amos and Isaiah. Even they recognize that the religious Abolitionists before the Civil War brought honor to the cause of religion, and that the churches of the South which condoned slavery, the Greek Orthodox Church of Russia which refused to resist Czarism, the preachers during the late war who stayed out of politics and condoned the war—that all these have done irreparable damage to the prestige of religion. Apparently, it was quite all right for religious teachers in the past to grapple with real social issues. Only religious teachers of the present may not.

The world today is beset with dangerous and complicated problems. Religion dare not stand aloof. It has a social message which it is under a moral obligation to apply. As a matter of practical policy as well as loyalty to an ideal, the rabbi should take his stand on these issues. And those who object either do not understand the social function of religion, or else are simply advocates of the status quo who use the argument, "Religion is all right in its place but . . . ." to stifle the voice of social protest.

A Step in the Right Direction

THE American Jewish Congress at its recent convention in Philadelphia took action that may be interpreted as indicating a change in policy which, although belated, is none the less welcome. It decided to defer the convening of the World Jewish Congress and to direct its major interest for the present to the organization of American Jewry. With this in view, it has sought to distribute responsibility through the creation of regional organizations whose heads would share with the New York office the honors and burdens of leadership. It also contemplates giving more attention to the organization of its local units.

This is good, if what the leaders have in mind is the organization of American Jewry to deal with the problem of Jewish life in its entirety both as it affects the daily living of Jews in this country and as it affects the interests of the Jews abroad. The creation of an integrated Jewish community life in America and throughout the world is, alongside the establishment of the Jewish national home, the major problem that confronts the Jewish people. But an organization which undertakes this task—and it is a tremendous one—must not limit the scope of its interests to fighting anti-Semitism or defending Jewish rights. Nothing Jewish must be alien to it. It must concern itself with all the economic, cultural and spiritual interests of the Jewish people and strive in all of them for the maximum of cooperation that can be achieved along liberal and democratic lines. If the Congress is timid or hesitant in assuming this task, it condemns itself to a position of being merely one more separate institution competing with other self-constituted organizations that share its general purpose. It cannot speak for the Jewish people as a whole, unless it interests itself in establishing the wholeness of the Jewish people and the interrelationship of all its interests.

We hope, therefore, that, in giving attention to the organization of American Jewry, the Congress means to go further than merely to mobilize Jews for mass action to meet emergencies. If it intends to organize Jewry not merely for emergencies but for the furtherance of all legitimate Jewish interests, it will have to take upon itself the task of propagandizing the *kehillah* idea and organizing local *kehillot* wherever the opportunity exists. In that case, it did well in its insistence on election of delegates to the Congress by individuals as well as by organizations. This is im-

portant, not as a requirement of democracy, but as a significant symbolic gesture. It symbolizes that the individual Jew owes a direct allegiance to the Jewish community as a whole which takes precedence over any institutional affiliation. But, unless the Congress aims at the organization of an integrated Jewish community, this gesture is meaningless. If the Congress will continue to function merely as one of several competing organizations, the direct election of its delegates will deceive no one as to its purely factional character.

The American Jewish Congress stands at the parting of the ways. Its traditions afford no adequate preparation for the larger tasks which we should like to see it assume. Called into being originally by the emergency of post-war conditions, it has hitherto conceived its function as the meeting of emergencies —unhappily a chronic need of Jewish life—and has not developed any technique for dealing with other day-to-day concerns of the Jewish people. It lacks the moral and financial assets of the Federation movement—its acquired capital, its experience in cooperation, its local prestige. But the Congress has one asset which the Federation movement lacks and that is an ideology which affirms the value of Jewish group life. If its affirmation of this value leads it to take responsibilty for the local organization of Jewry, it will be confronted in its relations with local Federations by a problem requiring patience, tact and diplomacy. Without their cooperation, it can effect little, and the task of winning their support for the idea of an organic Jewish community life will encounter tremendous forces of active opposition and passive inertia. We hope, however, that, having taken the first step in the right direction by turning its attention to the organization of American Jewry, the American Jewish Congress will march forward in this direction without faltering even though it sees clearly the obstacles in its path. If it justifies our hopes by making an earnest effort to effect an integrated, all-inclusive Jewish community life in America, it can count on the wholehearted support of THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST.

The Language Conflict in Palestine

SHOULD Jews in Palestine insist upon outlawing Yiddish from use in public functions? Should they prohibit the publication of Yiddish newspapers, or the establishment of a Yiddish theatre? These questions are agitating Palestine today. The Yiddishists feel that they are being persecuted; the Hebraists fear that Hebrew will be lost in the babel of tongues unless measures are taken.

The problem of language in Palestine is, of course, not a new one. In the early years of the rebuilding, while many of the settlers had been Zionists in their native places and had actually prepared their knowledge of Hebrew before they came, it was necessary, nevertheless, for zealous lovers of Hebrew to band together into the *Gedud Maginne Hassafah* (Legion of the Defenders of the Language) to promote the use of Hebrew. More recently, however, this problem has been accentuated by the tremendous influx of immigrants who have come out of sheer necessity, without Zionist ideals, without a love for the land or the culture of the Jews. These immigrants know no Hebrew, and are not particularly interested in cultivating it. They see no reason why they should not be permitted to continue to use the language which they brought with them.

The opposition to Yiddish on the part of Palestinians may perhaps be traced to two causes: first, the identification of Yiddish with *galut*, which Jews in Palestine wish to repudiate, and second, the desire for reprisals against Russia, where Yiddish is the dominant language of Jews and where Hebrew is officially banned. But for neither of these reasons would we express our sympathy

with the Hebraists. There is a much deeper reason: if the Jews of Palestine are ever to be welded into a unity, if ever they are to succeed in amalgamating the multiplicity of nationalities into one whole, it will be only through the general use of the Hebrew language.

Dr. Shalom Spiegel, in "Hebrew Reborn" writes, . . . "The revival of Hebrew and its transformation into a colloquial tongue with all the defects and virtues of a living language; the revival of Hebrew literature and its development within the last decades to a high intellectual and emotional level, and such progress in vocabulary as would have filled any civilized people with pride—these things have proved beyond a doubt the physiological genuineness of our rejuvenation as a people."

In Palestine, our people want to be rejuvenated, not merely sheltered. Nothing should be permitted to stand in the way of that rejuvenation.

How Maimonides Reconstructed Judaism

By MORDECAI M. KAPLAN

I.

THE octocentennial celebration of the birth of Maimonides invites us to evaluate for our day the significance of his contribution to the development of Judaism. The importance of that contribution is commonly regarded as based upon its success in harmonizing Judaism with the philosophy of his day. From the point of view of Maimonides' contemporaries, this evaluation of his achievement would be justified. To the "perplexed" of his day, whose intellectual difficulties were in no small degree occasioned by the impact of Greek philosophy, in its Arabic garb, on Jewish thought, Maimonides was indeed an inspiring guide. He made possible for them the reaffirmation of Jewish loyalty without sacrifice of intellectual integrity.

But for our own day that achievement has only historic interest. Our modern "perplexed" are as remote from Aristotelian scholasticism as they are from the traditionalism which it challenged. We need today a philosophy of Judaism which will achieve for our generation what the philosophy of Maimonides did for his. For us the significance of his intellectual career derives not so much from his teachings as from the fact that, notwithstanding the radical character of those teachings and the bitterness with which they were contested, they became an integral part of the Jewish tradition. That Judaism is capable of harboring two such diverse versions of its nature and meaning as the Talmudic and the Maimonidean proves that it lends itself to reconstruction whenever the conditions of life and thought demand it.

For Maimonides actually did reconstruct Judaism. He gave it a different intention from that assigned to it by the Talmud, and thus transformed, unknowingly no doubt, the entire pattern of Judaism's beliefs and practices. Just as with the same building material we can construct either homes to live in or shops to work in, so with the same teachings and institutions we can construct radically different social and religious systems. It is the intention that creates the pattern. Maimonides injected into Jewish tradition an intention different from that given to it by the very authorities whose decisions, dicta and interpretations he organized

into his great code. That intention stemmed not from them but from the Aristotelianism, combined with neo-Platonic elements, that he found in the philosophy of Avicenna.

The intention of any system of life may be inferred from the kind of salvation which that system promises. With the same authoritative texts and rules of conduct it is possible to fashion diametrically opposed types of character, depending upon what one conceives as the ultimate goal of human endeavor, the fulfillment of life's highest potentialities, or the supreme good which should determine life's purposes. Both the Rabbis and Maimonides use the term *ha-olam ha-ba* (the world to come) to designate salvation, or the attainment of life's goal, but they use it in two such radically different senses that they seem to be moving in different universes of discourse. The type of human being that would result from the effort to attain *ha-olam ha-ba* as the Rabbis understood it would resemble Hillel. The type of human being that would result from the effort to attain *ha-olam ha-ba* as Maimonides understood it would resemble Aristotle.

II.

According to the rabbinic view, *ha-olam ha-ba* is this world remade. The world as originally created was perfect. But man corrupted it through his sins. In the future, however, God will restore the world to its pristine perfection. It will in effect be a new world, "a new heaven and a new earth." The consequences of man's sin barred his way to the "tree of life," the fruit of which is immortality; and in further punishment of his sin he is doomed to a life of toil and travail. But this situation is not to endure for ever. The time will come when God "will swallow up death for ever." Deathless life in the world to come is the special prerogative of Israel. For Israel alone of all the nations accepted the Torah which was revealed by God in order that men might by the performance of its precepts earn their share in the world to come. Those in Israel who have sinned have to expiate their sin but eventually they, too, will be redeemed. Only a few very limited categories of offenders enumerated in the tenth chapter of the *Mishnah* of *Sanhedrin* are deemed to have forfeited this privilege. As to the other nations who have not accepted the Torah, they have no claim upon salvation, although righteous individuals among them may according to some authorities enjoy a share in the world to come.

The world to come was not traditionally conceived as a reward of individual merit, but rather as a claim to special grace on the part of Israel as God's chosen people who had accepted his Torah. The particular share of the world to come that would fall to each individual Jew might be related to his personal merit, but the enjoyment of salvation as such was part of the privilege of being a Jew.

Now let us see what Maimonides made of this doctrine of *ha-olam ha-ba.* After summarizing the traditional views current in his day, (Cf. Commentary on *Mishnah, Sanhedrin* Ch. 10), he cautions against taking literally any of the homiletic passages that describe the world to come. According to Maimonides, the world to come is the spiritual experience of the perfected individual soul after death, and cannot be apprehended by man so long as his soul is still attached to the body and dependent upon the senses. We can no more conceive the bliss of the world to come while we are yet alive, says Maimonides, than a fish can know the element of fire. Our senses are bodily functions and as such must perish with the destruction of the body. Man is corporeal and all his organic functions do but minister to his physical organism which inherently is subject to change and destruction. Death is,

therefore, his necessary end, as it is that of all animals. There is only one respect in which he differs significantly from them, and that is in his ability to contemplate the nature of God, who is eternal, infinite and unchanging. This ability renders the individual soul one with God for, from a philosophical point of view, the knower and the known are one. By thus becoming one with God the soul achieves spiritual immortality.

But such immortality is an achievement and not an inherent privilege. The assertion that all Israel have a portion in the world to come must not be construed to mean that every individual will actually, and in person, participate in this salvation. Its significance lies in the fact that God's revelation of the Torah to Israel, and to Israel alone, has given to the Jew exclusive possession of the main instrument of salvation. But to function as such an instrument the Torah must not only be obeyed but understood in terms of the highest intellectual truth. It must convey those right concepts of God by which the individual can enter into communion with him. Mere conformity to the commandments of the Torah without appreciation of their deeper meanings will never bring salvation. In the last analysis, it is metaphysical thinking alone that gives salvation. All the laws of the Torah are either symbols of metaphysical ideas, or are efforts to regulate the social life of the Jewish people to the end that it might be possible for great numbers of them to pursue the intellectual activities leading to a metaphysical comprehension of God.

The resurrection of the dead does not mean their resurrection to an everlasting corporeal existence. It means that, by a divine miracle, those of Israel who lead righteous lives in accordance with the precepts of the Torah will be resurrected in the days of the Messiah, so that they may enjoy the tranquility necessary for the study of the Torah and attain spiritual perfection and salvation. Their resurrected bodies will however, being bodies, eventually die. Their souls' salvation and immortality will be conditional upon the use they make in their new life of the opportunity for the intellectual communion with God.

It is thus apparent that Maimonides gave to the belief in *ha-olam ha-ba* a totally different meaning from that which it had for the Rabbis. In doing so he set up a new goal for Jewish life and a new hierarchy of spiritual values. Although he adopted *in toto* the same means to that goal as those urged by the Rabbis for what they conceived to be *ha-olam ha-ba,* he necessarily changed the character of those means by assigning a new function to them. It is therefore no exaggeration to state that Maimonides' version of Judaism is a complete reconstruction of it. To ascertain how Judaism looks in its reconstructed form we need only note the metamorphosis the three main concepts, God, Israel and Torah, undergo in Maimonides' system.

III.

First, as to the idea of God. Accepting literally, as the Rabbis did, the divine origin of the Torah, nothing could have seemed to them more irrelevant or superfluous than to prove the existence of God. Since the Torah was to them, beyond all possibility of doubt, the writing dictated by God, they could not conceive of anyone in his senses questioning his existence. The only kind of godlessness which the Rabbis seemed to be aware of was that which negated God's power in the world or his authority over human life, but not the godlessness which denied his existence. Throughout the rabbinic literature the expression "denier of the root" is applied not to one who denies God's existence but to one who challenges

his power and authority. (Ecc. R. 9, 12.) The passage in the Midrash (Gen. R. 39.1) which describes Abraham's first experience with God seems to imply that Abraham entertained a doubt as to the existence of God. The truth, however, is that the passage represents Abraham as perplexed whether God takes an interest in the world. R. Yizhak Nappaha compares the experience of Abraham to that of a person who, seeing a mansion on fire with no one making any effort to save it from the flames, wonders whether the mansion could possibly have a master. By that R. Yizhak intends to represent Abraham as troubled at the sight of the wicked who are permitted to carry on unrestrained their work of destruction.

The unity of God, as the Rabbis conceived it, means that among the multitude of spirit beings or, to use an apocryphal and pre-rabbinic term, holy beings, that populate the world, the one spirit being who revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to Moses and Israel, the one who is addressed in worship as our God and the God of our fathers, is the only true God. The Rabbis never for a moment doubted the existence of other supermundane beings besides the God of Israel. They considered angels, demons and countless spirits of all kinds as distinct, and at times visible, entities. When God revealed himself to Israel on Mount Sinai He was accompanied by hosts of other supernatural beings. "Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to Israel, 'Since you have seen many presences, you may think that there are many gods in heaven. Therefore know that I alone am God.' This is why the Ten Commandments open with the declaration, 'I am the Lord thy God'." (Exod. R. 29.1)

All such ideas are alien to the Maimonidean conception of God. Maimonides takes for granted that one cannot arrive at a correct conception of deity merely through a study of the surface meaning of the text of the Torah, as the Jewish people naively suppose. For to interpret the Torah quite simply and literally would make one a heretic who is denied salvation since he would be likely to picture God as a magnified human being and having human traits. Training in metaphysics as a means to the proper understanding of the Torah is thus as indispensable to salvation as conforming to the precepts of the Torah. But revelation must necessarily be couched in terms that will lead to its acceptance even by the unlearned. It must therefore use symbolic language which yields its full meaning only upon profound philosophical reflection. These assumptions carry an implication which Maimonides himself did not subscribe to, and that is that reason is superior to revelation. For reason thus becomes the criterion for judging the truth of any allegedly revealed statement. If such a statement appears unreasonable, then it does not mean exactly what it says. Instead it must be so interpreted that it comes to mean what, in any case, reason insisted that it should mean. Revelation is not, however, a criterion for judging the truth arrived at by reason. Where there is a conflict between them we do not discard our rational conviction to conform to revelation, but we change the meaning of revelation by a process of allegorical interpretation to conform to the conclusions of reason.

Exalted as Maimonides' conception of God undoubtedly is, it has manifestly more in common with the metaphysics of Aristotle than with the God idea as held by the ancient Prophets and teachers of Israel. Not a single one of the biblical passages quoted by Maimonides in support of his conception of God means what he reads into it. When Maimonides in consistency with his conception of God stamped all who ascribed anthropomorphic attributes to God as heretics who forfeited their share in the world to come, he quite justly aroused

the ire of his contemporary critic, Abraham ben David (RaBaD) of Posquières. "Better and greater men than he conceived God anthropomorphically on the basis of their interpretation of biblical passages, and even more by reason of the *agadot* that confused their minds." (*Hilkot Teshubah* I, 7) Evidently RaBaD, although himself sharing Maimonides' opinion on the interpretation to be given to the anthropomorphic epithets for God resents converting Greek philosophical concepts into Jewish religious dogmas.

Maimonides' rationalism also brought him into conflict with popular tradition on the question of miracles. Did the miracles recorded in the Bible actually occur? This was one of the most mooted problems of the day. From a consistently Aristotelian point of view, their occurrence is inconceivable. The average Jewish believer who knew nothing about Aristotle was not troubled by any intellectual difficulties with regard to miracles. But the Jews who came into contact with Greek philosophy were skeptical about the miracles. But such skepticism was very dangerous to their loyalty to Judaism, for popular tradition regarded these miracles as proof of God's special providence over Israel, and hence as validating Israel's claim to possessing the true revelation of God's will and the true key to salvation. Maimonides was, therefore, unwilling to deny their occurrence and felt himself compelled to prove their possibility as a matter of reason.

In doing so, Maimonides departed from Aristotelian conclusions but not from Aristotelian method. This was why he found it necessary to do two things which are superfluous in the traditional idea of God. He developed an elaborate argument to prove that the world was created out of nothing. Secondly, he explained miracles as exceptional arrangements in the order of nature, provided for at the time of creation. Although Maimonides seems here to be rallying to the defense of tradition, the pragmatic consequences of his interpretation of miracles are very different from those of the naive faith in miracles on the part of the unphilosophical traditionalist. The latter can cherish the belief that through prayer he can in a crisis influence God to intervene in his behalf even to the point of setting aside the laws of nature. A disciple of Maimonides, to be consistent, would have to consider such prayer vain, since the miracle either could not happen, in answer to the prayer, or else was preordained to happen from the very creation. In either case such prayer, being *tefillat shav*, would not be a legitimate act of worship.

Where Maimonides' conception of God diverges furthest from Jewish tradition is in its relation to the question of providence. According to the Aristotelian conception, God could not interest himself in perishable objects. His providence could, therefore, be exercised only over species but not over individuals. For before the discovery of the theory of evolution it was generally assumed that all species and, indeed, all general concepts were eternal and unchangeable. They were therefore spiritual "forms", not bodies, and could be objects in the mind of the eternal God. God could know them, but the particular transient individuals, beings composed of matter as well as form, or—to use terms that were almost synonymous in Aristotelian thought—of body as well as spirit—such beings were beneath God's notice. Hence God's providence could be conceived only as *hashgahah kelalit*, providence over the genus, but not as *hashgahah pratit*, providence over the individual. This is utterly in contradiction to traditional Jewish concepts which assume that God exercises his providence over the most insignificant of existences, to say nothing of human beings.

Maimonides, though under the influence of Aristotelian logic, was too much of a Jew to accept its more radical implications. He escapes from the dilem-

ma by an ingenious compromise between the traditional and the Aristotelian view, one that falls in beautifully with this idea of the *summum bonum* as the philosophic contemplation of God. According to him, the Aristotelian view is correct as far as it applies to the lower animals. It is also correct in its application to the generality of men. But inasmuch as it is possible for men to conceive God, he, by this very act of conception identifies himself with God and becomes an object of God's notice and solicitude. To such men as attain to an intellectual conception of an infinite, eternal and wholly spiritual God, he manifests his will and purpose. All men who do not attain to this conception are subject to natural law that makes for the preservation of the species, but are not subject to the providence of God in their personal life. Merely to state this view is sufficient for pointing out its radical departure from traditional ideas. So much for Maimonides' conception of God.

IV

Let us see next how the way in which Maimonides envisaged salvation involved a departure from the traditional conception of Israel. According to Talmudic Judaism, the only individuals whose attainments determine the superiority of Israel are the three patriarchs, since the choice of Israel is viewed as the fulfillment of God's promise to them. Israel is therefore conceived as enjoying divine favor because of the merit of the fathers, and God is accordingly addressed in prayer as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." But otherwise Israel in its collective capacity is superior in purpose and significance to any of its members, not even excepting Moses. The gift of prophecy was vouchsafed to Moses for the sake of Israel. This is the significance of the Midrashic interpretation of the words (Exod. 32:7) "And the Lord spoke unto Moses: 'Go, get thee down; for thy people, that thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt, have dealt corruptly.'" The Midrash represents Moses as replying: "Yesterday Thou saidst to me: 'Thou shalt come up, thou and Aaron with thee' (Exod. 19:24) and so also it is written: (Exod. 24:1) 'And unto Moses He said: 'Come up unto the Lord'; why then dost Thou tell me now: 'Go, get thee down'?". And the Midrash conveys God's answer in these words: "Not for thine own honor hast thou ascended to this height but for the honor of my children. I said to their patriarch: 'The messengers of the Lord rise and decline with Israel (an interpretation of the vision of Jacob at Beth El). When thy sons are righteous they rise and mount in the world and their representatives rise with them, and when they decline, their representatives share in their decline'." (Exod. R. 42:2)

Thus in rabbinic Judaism, the invividual hero, saint or prophet was not the end, and the people the means, but contrariwise; the mass was not designed to produce the superman, but superior men were endowed with special talents and given deeper insights and revelations to raise the life of the masses to a higher level. The realization of the spiritual implications of life, according to rabbinic Judaism, requires group life, and the larger the group, the greater is likely to be the manifestation of the divine. The habitat of the *Shekinah* is the *K'nesset Yisrael*, the Ecclesia of Israel, not an individual Jew, however spiritually great.

But to Maimonides the reverse is true. He is dominated by the Hellenic aristocratic ideal. For him the prophet or saint is the purpose of human existence. Israel's greatness, which he affirms no less zealously than the Sages, consists, according to him, not in its collective functioning as a people living in accordance with God's laws, but in its ability to produce a greater number of prophets and knowers of God. This is borne out by his interpretation of the belief in the Messiah. The only significance of

the Messianic kingdom for Maimonides is the opportunity it will afford, through the peace and tranquility of the Messianic era, for the scholar to achieve spiritual perfection through his intellectual activity. According to the traditional view, however, belief in the Messiah was the expression of hope for the return of Israel to its homeland and the recovery of its lost glory. The greatness of Israel would become so manifest to the nations that they would accept its spiritual hegemony and come to worship its God as the only true God.

V

Similarly in regard to the conception of Torah, Maimonides' understanding of what constituted salvation and the goal of human existence involved a departure from traditional attitudes. According to tradition, since the Torah is the word of God, those who study it and observe its *mizwot* enter into communion with God. This is true whether or not they understand the reasons for the *mizwot.*

But this was not the opinion of Maimonides. Since, according to Maimonides, God can be known only through the medium of the intellect, the only way in which the Torah can function as a medium of communion with God is by interpreting it in the light of reason.

Maimonides assigns two general objects to the Torah: the well-being of the soul and the well-being of the body. By the well-being of the soul he means entertaining correct opinions concerning God, nature and man. Under the term well-being of the body he includes all practical commandments both mandatory and prohibitive that have as their object the government of the state and the best possible relations among men. The latter are a means to the former, for the perfection of the soul which is attained through knowledge is the purpose of human life.

When we examine what kind of precepts have as their object the well-being of the soul, we discover that they are usually of the kind that we term ritual. Some of them, like the sacrificial laws, have the negative purpose of weaning the Israelites away from idolatrous and superstitious notions of God; others, like the law of the sabbath, the *tefillin,* the prayers, have the positive purpose of inculcating belief in the unity, eternity and incorporeality of God. If we fail to discover any purpose in the precepts, it is due either to deficiency in our knowledge or to the weakness of our intellect. When the Sages say of the *hukkim,* "These are things which I have ordained, you dare not criticize them," their words are not to be interpreted as meaning that it is forbidden to search for the purpose of those precepts, but as warning us against finding fault with the precepts or disregarding them because we happen to be unable to see any purpose to them.

From that standpoint the purpose even of ethical conduct is merely to make possible that tranquility which is necessary to the contemplation of God. As to what constitutes the right and the good, Maimonides falls back upon the Aristotelian teaching of the Golden Mean. That teaching is basically esthetic rather than ethical. To quote from Aristotle himself: "We say of good works of art, 'It is not possible to take away or add anything,' implying that excess and defect destroy goodness in art. Virtue is more exact and better than any art." But this attitude toward ethics as a fine art is worlds removed from the passion for righteousness which animated the Prophets. Nevertheless Maimonides finds it so compatible with his notion of Judaism that he makes this doctrine of the Golden Mean part of his introduction to the Ethics of the Fathers.

VI.

The foregoing instances of the difference between rabbinic Judaism and Maimonides' interpretation of it are

sufficient to make evident what a transformation Judaism underwent at his hands. He subjected its theological beliefs, its national aspirations, its ritual observances, its social institutions and ethical ideals to revaluation in accordance with his philosophic conception of *ha-olam ha-ba.* That his reinterpretation came to be regarded as a classic expression of Jewish teaching is most significant. If Judaism is capable of including Maimonides' Commentary to the *Mishnah,* his *Mishneh Torah* and his "Guide to the Perplexed" in its library of religious classics, it is because Judaism is more than a specific philosophy of life; it is a segment of life. Judaism is more than a religion; it is a civilization.

If we seek to account for the reason why Maimonides, notwithstanding his untraditional views, was accepted as a great religious authority in Israel, the answer is to be found in his relation to the Jewish people and its civilization. His life was wholly consecrated to their service; their interests were his interests. The criterion of Jewishness is loyalty to Jewish interests, material and spiritual, rather than acquiescence in any particular creed. The Jewish people could forgive, or ignore, Maimonides' heterodox views when they did not accept them because they recognized his devotion to maintaining the unity and integrity of Jewish life. He may have viewed Jewish life from a novel viewpoint and one that was profoundly influenced by alien thought, but he viewed it in its entirety, was interested in every aspect of it, and devoted his life to reconstructing Judaism in accordance with a consistent pattern that took account of everything which Jewish tradition held sacred,—the Bible, the Talmud, Jewish observance, Jewish hopes for the millenium.

The great importance that Maimonides attached to the principle, "Separate not thyself from the community" is significant. "He who departs from the ways of the community, even though he commit no transgressions but only separates himself from the congregation of Israel, and performs no *mizwot* in association with them, and does not enter into their troubles nor share their fasts but goes his way as if he were one of the Gentiles and not one of their own number—such a person has no share in the world to come." (*Hilkot Teshubah,* 3, 14.) That is why those of the Jewish people who could not follow the metaphysical reasoning of the *Moreh Nebukim* could revere Maimonides for his Commentary on the *Mishnah* and above all for his great code, the *Mishneh Torah.* That is why simple Jews who lacked scholarship altogether were impressed by what they knew of the saintly character of the man who, notwithstanding his colossal literary labors and the time that he had to devote to his professional duties as physician, gave himself without stint in the gratuitous performance of his rabbinic function and in answering the many *sh'elot* that were sent to him from all over the Jewish world.

VII.

Today, eight hundred years after the birth of Maimonides, the Jewish people again needs guidance in its perplexities. As in the days of Maimonides, thinking Jews who have had contact with non-Jewish thought find it impossible to accept traditional concepts as valid. The content of Maimonides' philosophy is outdated. The challenge to Jewish tradition no longer comes from classic Greek philosophy, but from the natural and social sciences of our day and from the social and economic conditions that threaten the integrity and continuity of Jewish civilization. But the method of Maimonides in his approach to the problems of his day may still avail us. For Maimonides, guided by what he felt to constitute the supreme goal or salvation of the Jew, projected this into the traditional conception of *ha-olam ha-ba,*

and made it the standpoint from which he proceeded to revaluate and reconstruct the whole of Jewish life.

We must act similarly in our day. Neither the traditional conception of *ha-olam ha-ba* as a world miraculously perfected and free of death, sin, toil and all other evils, nor Maimonides' conception of it as an eternal life of intellectual communion with God for the souls of the righteous after death, can satisfy the modern Jew or serve as giving direction to his Jewish efforts. *Ha-olam ha-ba* must mean to us the attainment through human effort of a social order that shall do justice both to the rights of the individual and to the needs of society as an integrated whole. In accordance with this conception we must be prepared to revise our traditional notions about God, Israel and the Torah so that they may provide the necessary sanction, motive and method for the achievement of salvation as conceived in these humanistic terms. In doing so we must reckon with every phase of our ancient tradition which Israel has held sacred in the past, reinterpret its implications and reconstruct its values in terms of unity, harmony and creativity in our personal and social life.

We must be as hospitable, as was Maimonides, to truth from whatever source it may be derived, not hesitating to apply scientific criteria to the criticism of traditional concepts. But our reconstruction of Judaism must take account of the organic relationship of all its important concepts to one another and to the totality of Jewish civilization. Our God-idea must be one that gives us confidence and courage to persevere as a people in the quest of salvation for ourselves and the world. Our concept of Israel must be in harmony with the idea of a world-order based on justice and freedom for all men and nations. Such a world-order would manifest the reality of God. And our conception of Torah must be one that will enable it, without demanding any sacrifice of intellectual integrity, to offer intellectual guidance, stimulus and inspiration to Jewish activity. To achieve such a reconstruction of Judaism will require much patient study, labor and much social experimentation. The tremendous energy, infinite patience and utter devotion that Maimonides gave to the reconstruction of Judaism in his day may serve us as a noble example.

Nationalism and Universalism in the Writings of Maimonides

By LEON S. LANG

I

THESE days, when we feel so intensely on the question of Jewish nationalism, the universal exaltation of the genius and attainments of Moses Maimonides presents some embarrassment, for his writings do not seem to reflect those ardent aspirations for the Jewish people which might provide present-day Jewish nationalism the comfort and inspiration that we find in the much more "patriotic" sentiments expressed by the poet Jehudah Halevi. Ahad Ha-am, the philosopher of modern Jewish nationalism, comes to the defense of Maimonides by insisting that his plea to the Jews of Yemen to await the ultimate coming of the Messiah proves that he was "fully aware of the impor-

tance of the future for the preservation of the Jewish people, and therefore gave it a place among the principles of the Jewish religion." (Selected Essays, pp. 86-87.) Still Professor Schechter could not pass over so lightly the striking omission from the Thirteen Principles of Faith, of the belief in the Election of Israel which unquestionably reflects consistently, in biblical and in rabbinic thought, a faith in the uniqueness of the Jewish destiny and of its divine direction. (Aspects of Rabbinic Theology, p. 57). Professor Finkelstein asking the pertinent question, "Can Maimonides Still Guide Us?" admits quite frankly, that Maimonides hardly reckons at all with Israel as a people, and therefore, "For us, in this generation, this seems a great defect in Maimonides' teaching." (Rab. Assemb. Proc., 1928; p. 101).

It seems hardly necessary, from the facts of his life and works, to prove Maimonides a true nationalist by a process of rationalization, or to label him a pure universalist because of the absence of those encomiums of land and people that characterize the conventional national patriot. Like every other illustrious expression of the human spirit, Maimonides reflects the resultant of the impact between the force of his own personality and the forces which were prevalent in his own times. In temperament, in the native trends of his inner development, Maimonides was essentially of the character typified by strong logic, an analytical mind, a yearning for resolving variety into an orderly unity and a firm belief in the need for avoidance of extremes in emotional expression of any kind. The turbulent times in which Maimonides lived helped to accentuate this natural bent in the personality of the man. The tradition and law of Israel provided him with an instrument for crystallizing his yearning for unity and orderly arrangement; the metaphysics and ethics of Aristotle revived by the Arabic thinkers provided an intellectual challenge to his own keen powers of reason; the bitter, religious conflicts and passions prevailing in the lands bordering on the Mediterranean confirmed him in a natural conviction that the most satisfying objective of human life must be the individual's preoccupation with eternal and universal truths, which, when traced to their ultimate source, are found to flow from God, the Highest Intellect and the Final Cause.

What distinguishes Maimonides from Jehudah Halevi was not simply this surface expression of national aspirations but just this difference of character and experience. Jehudah Halevi was more poet than philosopher, more romanticist than rationalist. In the *Kuzari*, Jehudah Halevi synthesized metaphysical analysis with these emotional, dynamic qualities of a vibrant spirit. Note that the very form of the *Kuzari* is that of the dialogue, a dramatic argument, and not the monologue of the analyist. Moreover, when Halevi sang fervently and longingly, "I am in the west and my heart is in the east", and when he poured out his love for the soil that was sacred to him with memories of his people's past, it was before he had met with the stark realities of a devastated ruin into which Zion had been laid waste by the Crusaders. Had tragedy not overtaken the poet soon after he set foot on the land of his dreams, what might have been his impressions of the Palestine which Maimonides saw when he lived there for a very brief time, after his flight from Fez and the Almohades? It may be the poet would even then have drawn a glorious hope out of a gloomy and disheartening scene. But for the more reasoned observer like Maimonides such an experience would have laid bare the hopelessness of maintaining there a vital Jewish life and of fostering Jewish culture. Jehudah Halevi died in Erez Yisrael and still fires the imagination of the lover of Zion; Maimonides settling in Egypt helped to conserve Jewish learning, gave practical counsel to innumerable Jews and their communi-

ties and thus preserved their courage and will to live, by the logical force of his plea for maintaining the integrity of Jewry. Viewed from this light, the question as to whether Maimonides expressed aspirations for the Jewish people hinges on our proper evaluation of his personality and of the conditions of his time.

II

It may escape us that the particular brands of nationalism which prevail in our present-day thinking do not find their exact parallel in those of less than two centuries ago. Contemporary nationalistic aspirations are the outgrowth of the social and political forces that were set loose by the introduction of a machine age and the rise of social democracy. The very prayers for the return of Israel to its ancient homeland, which were repeated fervently by every pious Jew for centuries, have a different connotation from the contemporary yearning for a national homeland, either as a political and economic refuge or as a cultural center. Fundamentally, to be sure, it is our homelessness that has kept alive this irrepressible hunger for the renascence of the Jewish people in its own land. At the basis of this prayer and of these dreams is also the conviction that the confusion and insecurity which mark our experience as a people in perpetual wandering would not only disappear in a homeland but that a higher development of the Jewish genius would ultimately find its richest and fullest expression there. But what is the nature of that Jewish genius? Are we today so agreed on the reply to this question as were the contemporaries of Maimonides and of Jehudah Halevi? Describing the Messianic era when "the kingdom will revert to Israel who will return to the Holy Land", the *Rambam* declares, "In that era there will not be famine or war, jealousy or strife. Prosperity will be widespread, all comforts found in abundance. The sole occupation throughout the world will be to know the Lord. Hence Israelites will be very wise, learned in things that are now hidden, and will attain a knowledge of the Creator to the utmost capacity of the human being; as it is said, 'for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea' (Isaiah 9, 9)" (*Mishneh Torah, Melachim,* 12, 5).

To Maimonides, who felt he was subjecting tradition and even God to reason, the highest perfection to which man could attain was the contemplation of metaphysical thought. He recognized that such a goal would bestow happiness only on a favored few, largely because the great mass of people, through their ignorance or inability to comprehend, would be incapable of reaching this lofty objective. But this fact alone would not dissuade Maimonides from maintaining that the higher goal was the only true objective of Judaism and that the Jewish people lived largely to make that contemplative experience a reality. Above all, the entire Jewish tradition, the very transmission of Torah, was an expression of God's purpose to permit the Jew to attain to this pinnacle of human perfection. As the intelligent teacher, he had regard for gradations in mental powers among the people; but as the conserver of the basic principles of Judaism, Maimonides was unwilling to place the ultimate of human happiness on any lower plane. Every other source of happiness might satisfy those who can only partially attain the higher objective, but Maimonides reads his Jewish history and the precepts of Jewish Prophets as pointing to that ultimate perfection. It is in this tone that he concludes the "Guide to the Perplexed". The acquisition of material possessions is of only passing importance. The sound health of the body is a necessary consideration only because it is a contributing factor to the full release of the powers of the intellect. The ethical and peaceful relationships between human beings in their necessary social atmos-

phere are an expression of that greater universal harmony, the contemplation of which, in the final analysis, is the most satisfying goal of all human striving.

One can well imagine that Maimonides felt sincere happiness akin to pride in the conviction that his Jewish heritage so neatly coincided with the dictates of cool reason and dispassionate metaphysics. Amidst the pressures that were thrusting the Jew into religious skepticism, on the one hand, and terrors of religious persecution, on the other, Maimonides found solace for himself, and provided hope and comfort for countless other Jews, in what was in reality a kind of intellectualistic patriotism. Aristotle the philosopher was intriguing and essentially true, said Maimonides, in effect, but Judaism embraced that truth and went further to a higher and more universal truth. Consequently, Jews maintain the infallibility of tradition, which was a divine revelation. Islam and Christianity contained in their teachings much that was true and beneficial to mankind, but Judaism was the mother from whom both had drawn their source of vital meaning. Therefore, Jews must be patient and faithful and await even at great sacrifice the glorious vindication of the Jewish dream, a dream that would yet be realized in a Messianic era still to make its appearance. When we read the Thirteen Principles of Faith, from this perspective, we cannot fail to discover in them a rationalist's hymn of loyalty and unswerving devotion to all that Maimonides believed with his entire heart and soul was the loftiest expresson of the Jewish genius and that which stamped the essential character of the Jewish people. This was the form of nationalism suitable to his own day and to the special attributes of his own nature. It may not satisfy the definitions of Jewish loyalty that would prevail today. But it also does not warrant our making a detached universalist and theologian of the *Rambam*.

Indeed, not a few of the limitations of the philosophy of Maimonides may well arise because of his unwillingness to challenge those axioms which fidelity to Jewish tradition prevented him from disturbing. Thus perhaps the most vulnerable points in the thinking of Maimonides are due to some of his interpretations of the Bible. The Torah, having been transmitted with painstaking care from Moses direct to the rabbis of the Tanaitic schools, containing the direct Revelation from Mount Sinai, had a twofold meaning, one readable to those who saw only surface meanings and the other for those who could follow the hidden interpretations. Not a letter was superfluous and not a phrase out of its correct position. An historical, developmental approach to the biblical period could never arise within such assumptions. (Cf. Friedlander, "Past and Present", pp. 201, ff.) What we might call, then, this irrational loyalty to the infallible tradition of the Prophets and teachers of Israel was compensated for by the *Rambam's* ability to discover in these hidden meanings those truths which logic forced him to accept out of the philosophical dissertations of the Greek thinkers, notably Aristotle. Thus it is not Aristotle that was raised in the estimate of Maimonides by this inverted reasoning, but Jewish teaching, the profound universality of which is apparent to those who can penetrate deeply enough.

III

From Maimonides' frequent emphasis upon a kind of intellectual aristocracy, we might have been led into the error of believing him to have been a spiritual recluse. Fortunately, his own letters and the records of a few contemporaries leave no basis for any such erroneous conclusion. His day was filled from early morn until several hours after dark with skilled medical service to fellowbeings, Jews and Gentiles, and with personal counsel and instruction to the hundreds that came to him

from all corners of the earth. His letters to the Jewish communities of Yemen, the Provence and to scholarly colleagues and disciples indicate a warmth of kinship with people such as we normally consider to be remote from the conventional academician and contemplative philosopher. If Maimonides was a universalist in metaphysics, he was no less universal in embracing in his own heart the sorry plight of *Klal Yisrael* and of seeking to provide for them at least a spiritual refuge for their terrorized bodies and souls. It was not only a native love of orderliness and logical arrangement that drove the *Rambam* to collate the most comprehensive code of Jewish practice ever compiled; it was as he himself states because "During the present period, extraordinary troubles have arisen . . . and the wisdom of our Sages and the understanding of our great minds have become lost and obscure." It was the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Jewish people through knowledge and its translation into conduct that motivated Maimonides in undertaking this gigantic task.

Although we may find it difficult to return to many of the assumptions of Maimonides, the religious thinker, there is much that is refreshing and stimulating in recalling to mind a set of Jewish loyalties, different than those which motivate most of us today, but which were extremely valuable in the course of Jewish adjustment during a critical period in our history. Maimonides represents a most important step in this remarkable career of the Jewish people, namely in seeking self-realization through traditional sources while, at the same time, absorbing the best of other civilizations. Perhaps in this alone the strong loyalties of Maimonides and the Jewish nationalism of our own time have something in common. Nearly four thousand years of an historic process have cultivated in our spirits a nostalgia for folk-ways, institutions, a language, a literature native to our people in the course of its evolution, which acquired their special connotations and meaning for Jews who have not deliberately divorced themselves from the knowledge of that process. But at the same time we have been among the first to sense, especially in more recent years, the striking changes which contemporary civilization must undergo in order to avoid pit-falls in which, some already believe, man is groveling hopelessly and without promise of salvation. The Jew persists in dreaming his dream of the improvement, if not the perfection of mankind. Maimonides sought the perfection of the individual through delving into the mystic truths of God's cosmos. For us today the much more practical and less metaphysical goal is the approximation of a more smoothly operating social structure. We who believe in the Jewish people and strive for some assurance of its continuity and free self-development share this basic hope in the ultimate fulfillment of such a promise for humanity.

BOOK REVIEW

The Position of the German Jew

THE RISE AND DESTINY OF THE GERMAN JEW, Jacob R. Marcus, Ph. D., Department of Synagogue and School Extension of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Cincinnati, 1934.

DR. MARCUS has provided a valuable handbook and guide to the position of Jewry under the Third Reich. "The Rise and Destiny of the German Jew" offers a detailed and factual description of the anti-Jewish legislation and practices of the Nazi government; it traces the development of anti-Semitism and of its racial ideology; it analyzes critically the ethnic theories on which German anti-Semitism bases itself, and it reveals the actual causes of anti-Semitic prejudice in Germany for

which the racial argument is a rationalization. The book then proceeds to give a careful account of the place of the Jew in German politics and economics and his literary, scientific and esthetic contributions to Teutonic culture.

As a compendium of facts Dr. Marcus' work is unexcelled. It is carefully documented, painstakingly detailed and remarkably complete. Its value throughout is enhanced by the addition of a large bibliography, of topics for discussion, and an index.

The broad outlines of most of the picture which Dr. Marcus draws are by now a matter of common knowledge. Most informed readers are already familiar with them. The contribution which this book makes lies in two distinct directions. It offers a mass of detail that fill in concretely vague popular impressions. In addition, chapters which describe the inner life of the German Jew are of special value. In these Dr. Marcus presents material by no means so widely known. The best informed reader has much to learn from the sections which treat of the organization of the German-Jewish community, with party groups in German-Jewish life, Jewish social service, education, youth movements, and cultural problems.

Dr. Marcus has striven to be objective. He considers it his function to describe and interpret, not to evaluate the facts which form his materials. The reader is sometimes more than a little irritated by his author's refusal to take sides, even on violent controversial issues such as the boycott and Zionism. But if studied detachment is often annoying and if from one point of view it is this book's major weakness, from another point of view it is its prime strength. By very virtue of his balance Dr. Marcus gains the confidence of his reader. After all, the facts do speak eloquently for themselves without the addition of moral judgments.

In his prophecy as in his history, Dr. Marcus is non-committal. Having surveyed the evidence dispassionately, he comes to the conclusion that both Hitlerism and anti-Semitism in some form are likely to persist in Germany. He is inclined to believe that the German-Jewish community will ultimately be semi-ghettoized and that German Jewry will survive, though he is none too confident that such will be the case.

To the reader who looks for propaganda and protest this book cannot be recommended. But for one who wishes bare, naked facts lucidly presented without bias or evaluations, "The Rise and Destiny of the German Jew" is the best compendium which has as yet appeared.

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